

MEMORANDUM

To: Jerry Voorhis
From: J. H. Steele, FMS

Cooper: W. H.

Subject: Work now being done in the Dominican Republic and plans for the future.

Purpose: To help the people in the Dominican Republic, and ultimately in all of Latin America, develop a genuinely democratic way of life, improve their social, economic and moral life, in harmony with the Christian philosophy of the whole man, and to accomplish this fast enough so that these people, who for centuries have been exploited, and sunk in poverty and ignorance, can be saved from Communism.

Background: I was trained in the Antigonish movement of adult education and cooperatives, and had the privilege of working several years with the founders of the movement, Dr. Jimmy Thompkins, and Dr. Coady. I spent some seven years in China with the Foreign Mission Society before being transferred to the Dominican Republic.

Naturally, I was sent to the Dominican Republic to work for the moral welfare of the people, but I immediately saw that no moral progress could be made without social and economic progress. I saw in Santa Domingo a people nominally Catholic, in tradition and sentiment, but without morality, due to centuries of poverty, exploitation and neglect.

I had come in direct contact with Communists in China. I know their methods. I saw that these people in Santa Domingo were ripe for Communism. The people are 20% totally illiterate -- the rest can barely read or write. They have a slave mentality. They have few ideas, and few ideals. They have never learned to think for themselves. I saw that the only way to help these people was not be doing things for them, but by working with them, teaching them how to do things for themselves. I also saw that all economic enterprises would be in vain if we did not change the mentality.

Methods used: To accomplish our ends, we organize the people in their communities into groups, which study and save together. They study two hours a week at least. Subjects covered are the Three R's (most of the portion of the people called literate can hardly read or write); family and social life; nutrition, health; various economic systems: capitalism, socialism, communism; Christian social philosophy; modern agricultural methods, etc.; techniques of credit unions and co-ops.

All people in the group must learn to save a little each week, and as soon as they are ready we form a credit union. We start with credit unions as the focal point, as the need for low-cost credit, and for the formation of thrift habits is so great. Usury is widespread. I know of many instances where people have paid over a thousand percent interest.

We have regular local, regional and country-wide annual meetings. Each group has its social hall, with debates and dances between different groups. This is a means of building a rural social life to retain the youth on the land.

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All of the groups have embryonic libraries - - - we insist on that. We do everything to encourage the habit of reading. We publish a monthly magazine and provide it without charge. We hold contests to spur the people we read.

Results to date:

Some 15,000 men in some 75 groups in all parts of the country are at present in these study groups. They have saved \$200,000 in the last year and a half. We have three or four experimental co-ops; selling rice, chocolate, coffee and corn, the principle products.

Experience has shown that it takes approximately three years of weekly study periods before a change of mentality is evidenced; before the people can see that there is a better way of life, and that they want it.

This plan began to show concrete results. Two years ago the President of the country called for me and requested that I extend this movement as fast as possible to all parts of the country.

He gave me a small school to train the abler people in leadership. The superiors of the Foreign Mission Society then gave me permission to spend full time at this work.

The School

In addition to the weekly study groups all over the country, we have a small school for the formation of leaders. We offer a two week course of intensive study, once a month. Twenty-five men are taken in each course, hand picked from all parts of the country on the basis of intelligence, and leadership potential. They live together, and are boarded free at the school. We have a small garden, which provides food, and which we use to teach advanced agricultural methods (composting, etc.) We use books, movies, discussion, and field trips. We make use of whatever is available to us; for instance, the American Embassy provides good films on agriculture. We now have five full time employees at the school.

Future Plans: We plan small industries for towns and rural areas to keep the people on the land, and we hope, through the co-ops we are forming, to buy land to prevent its falling into the hands of rich speculators.

The

Opportunity: Last winter, at the request of Monsignor Ligutti, of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, I attended the Latin American Conference on rural problems held in Columbia. There were over 600 delegates from 27 nations there. I explained the work we are doing in Santa Domingo.

I told them I believed all of South America is in great danger of falling into communism because of the centuries of poverty, ignorance and exploitation. Communism has already gotten a foothold in Guatemala. I told them I believed the only answer is to show the people how they can attain a better life for themselves through self help: credit unions, co-ops, education and development of democratic processes. These ideas were enthusiastically received.

Twenty-seven people from fifteen different countries insisted on coming to Santa Domingo to study our techniques of adult education and credit unions. I would be glad to have them do this, and from all indications, this would be only the beginning of a steady stream of visitors to Santa Domingo to study with us. I have only one difficulty--I do not have any place for these people to live. One man begged to come. He said he would sleep on the floor. But I do not have room for twenty-seven people, even if they were willing to sleep on the floor.

The immediate need:

I need 30,000 dollars so I can build and equip a building to house these people. The need is urgent because they want to come this fall. I must prepare to receive them this year.